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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BAGHDAD 002548

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: KEY IRAQI LEADERS PROMISE SUPPORT FOR SUNNI
INCLUSION IN CONSTITUTIONAL COMMITTEE

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission David M. Satterfield for
reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

1. (C) SUMMARY: On the margins of the June 14 swearing-in of Massoud Barzani as Kurdistan Regional President in Irbil, DCM engaged leaders from all Iraqi political groups to urge them to support the inclusion of 15 credible Sunnis in the constitutional committee. All interlocutors were supportive of our approach, but with varying degrees of optimism regarding the ability of the fragmented Sunni political elite to come together on names or numbers. END SUMMARY.

ENGAGING KEY LEADERS ON SUNNI INCLUSION

2. (C) On June 14, on the margins of a ceremony to swear-in KDP leader Massoud Barzani as president of the Kurdistan-Iraq Regional Government, DCM (accompanied by MNF-I Deputy Chief of Staff for Political, Military and Economic Operations MG Hank Stratman) pressed key Iraqi leaders to settle the issue of the constitutional committee with an inclusive process that brings in up to 15 Sunnis. DCM spoke separately with President Jalal Talabani; Vice President Adel Abdul-Mehdi; Hassan Hamoudi, chairman of the constitutional committee in the TNA; Hachem al-Hassani, speaker of the TNA; Kurdistan-Iraq Regional President Massoud Barzani; and incoming Prime Minister of the Kurdistan-Iraq (unified) Regional Government Nechirvan Barzani to drive home the urgency of resolving the Sunni constitutional role. He asked them to weigh in with both Sunnis and their own constituencies to ensure positive outcomes. DCM noted that the most senior levels of the USG are concerned at the prospect of further delays in the process, as this would benefit the insurgents and cause Iraqis to lose hope in the electoral process.

3. (C) In a detailed discussion touching on a range of constitutional issues, Hassan Hamoudi told Charge that he could accept limiting the numbers of Sunnis to 15. He said that Sunni Waqf leader Sheikh Adnan Dulaymi wielded real influence on this issue, but he was playing a spoiler role because he believed he was about to be relieved from his post. DCM said the U.S. was prepared to weigh in with Ja'aferi to prevent this, and committed to continued U.S. efforts with Dulaymi directly.

4. (C) Adel Abdul Mahdi and Hachem Hassani were both more skeptical that they, or we, could win broad Sunni acceptance of the latest initiative. The Sunnis are pressing for larger numbers because they are not united. Both leaders advised DCM to weigh in with Salah Mutlag, although Abdul-Mehdi said he believes in the end the U.S. would simply have to choose 15 names from the Sunni list and "have done with it." Hammoudi told DCM that he had a fallback plan to constitute a separate advisory committee of 57 Sunnis, whom the constitutional committee would consult with weekly to solicit views. Hammoudi said he would not broach this "plan B" unless all else failed, viewing it as unwieldy and less than likely to gain Sunni support. DCM agreed on both points, noting that Iraqis must keep the process within the (enlarged) committee. Hammoudi also reiterated concern regarding the UN, saying that "some Sunnis" are listening to "some voices from the UN" and expect that "Ashraf Qazi would come at the end as their savior" to arbitrate the issue of Sunni inclusion. Hammoudi dismissed such talk as "dangerous nonsense." For his part, Hassani said he would be traveling in the next week, but would weigh in with key figures upon his return.

BARZANI WILL ENGAGE SUNNIS IN BAGHDAD AND IRBIL

5. (C) Massoud Barzani said he had twice convened Sunnis before the elections to urge them to participate in elections, but most had been too afraid to vote. This would not happen again because they now realized the price of non-participation. He said there were some former Ba'athists who were organizing. They were still waiting in the wings, but the Kurds were exploring engagement. In the meantime, he committed to weigh in with Adnan Dulaymi, who had asked to come see him upon Barzani's return from Baghdad (on or about June 20).

16. (C) Barzani said he thought that Dulaymi, although a hardliner, would come around to limiting the Sunnis to 15 new members. Barzani agreed with DCM's characterization of a splintered leadership among Sunnis that complicated all dialog with them. Sunnis must realize, he said, they are now "only one part of" a political process that includes others. They had not yet adapted to this reality. DCM agreed they had experienced a psychological earthquake, which had reverberated throughout the whole region. Barzani claimed that his "longstanding ties" to the Sunni leadership gives him a special influence, greater than that of Kurdish rival President Talabani, whose calls for 25 Sunnis to join the drafting committee had been "unhelpful".

TALABANI BACKTRACKS

17. (C) An upbeat President Talabani told DCM he regretted his earlier ("misinterpreted") call for 25 new Sunnis, and that he too would support the addition of only 15 new members, and committed to work with Iraqi Islamic Party Leader Mohsin Abdul Hamid (present at the swearing in). KRG Prime Minister Nechirvan Barzani, in a separate meeting, told DCM that Talabani had felt obliged to publicly support up to 25 Sunnis in order to make amends for his earlier statements supporting the integration of Badr Corps into the Iraqi Army (an idea strongly opposed by the Sunnis). Nechirvan agreed that President Barzani had credibility with Dulaymi and had agreed to leverage him. He said that the Kurds would also weigh in with key Shia. SCIRI leader Abdul-Aziz Hakim was currently in Iran, but the Kurds would follow up upon his return. He said Hammoudi was also a critical player.

JA'AFERI NOT COMMITTED TO TAL OR THE KURDS?

18. (C) Barzani said he believes once the constitutional committee meets, things could move rapidly, perhaps within weeks. But only if the Shia remained true to their commitment they would treat the TAL as "the" constitutional framework. If they deviated from the TAL as the foundation -- and there were real fears among Kurds that Ja'aferi would waffle -- it would be an entirely different story.

19. (C) Nechirvan Barzani said the Kurds were very wary of Ja'aferi. He had not attended the President's swearing in or the Kurdistan National Assembly opening, nor sent greetings, he had stalled on convening the Article 58 committee, he had not mentioned federalism or Kirkuk or the Kurds in his government program, he has never mentioned Kurdish suffering, and he has gutted some of the powers of key Kurdish ministers, such as the Minister of Planning Barham Salih.

110. (C) COMMENT: Barzani is prepared to use his influence with key Sunni leaders, although the meeting with Dulaymi will have to await his return from Baghdad. Although Abdul-Mahdi and Hassani were more downbeat than usual, they recommended that Embassy continue to work over the Sunni leadership -- notably Mutlaq and Dulaymi -- to press for 15 names coinciding with our own approach. We will continue to stress that there will be no understanding in Iraq or elsewhere, certainly the U.S., if a consensus-based constitutional drafting process is held up over two or three names. END COMMENT

111. (U) REO HILLA, REO BASRA, REO MOSUL, and REO KIRKUK, minimize considered.
Jeffrey